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ABSTRACT

Using the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ), the study examined the self-image of rural high school youth. The primary subjects were 127 randomly selected students from a rural community high school. The community was predominantly white and middle-class. A second rural sample consisted of 42 students selected from 3 tiny country schools from another midwestern state. A self-descriptive personality test of adjustment, the OSIQ measured adjustment in 11 areas representing important aspects of the teenager's psychological world: impulse control, emotional tone, body- and self-image, social relations, morals, sex attitudes, family relations, external mastery, vocational and educational goals, psychopathology, and superior adjustment. Each item consisted of a statement with 6-option Likert-type response scale. Also studied were school size, parental education and occupation, sibling age and sex, and adolescents' sex, age, occupational and educational aspirations, religiosity, and attitudes toward women. Findings included: youth from the large consolidated school showed lower self-images than youth attending the small country schools; younger youth frequently showed lower self-image on body- and self-image, vocational and educational goals, and sex attitudes; girls felt better about themselves than did boys on items measuring morals, while the reverse sex effect held for emotional tone, body- and self-image, and psychopathology. (NQ)

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Self-Image and Its Correlates Among Rural High School Youth

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Introduction

In a recent study, we found that rural high school youth reported lower self images than comparable youth in urban and suburban communities (Petersen, Offer, & Kaplan, 1978). The present paper extends those results and examines other factors related to self-image among rural youth. In particular, we studied school size and several individual factors including parental education and occupation, sibling age and sex, as well as the adolescents' sex, age, occupational and educational aspirations, religiousity, and attitudes toward women.

Background

During adolescence, there is an intense focus upon the development of an identity (e.g., Erikson, 1968). While an individual's identity is personal and idiosyncratic, there is evidence of systematic variation in self-image due to such factors as sex and age (Offer & Howard, 1972). To

examine broader influences upon self-image, we have recently been studying rural youth in comparison to youth from other communities. Type of community, in terms of urbanicity, seems to play a major role in self-image. With our samples at least, rural youth had significantly lower self-image than their urban and suburban counterparts (Petersen, Offer, & Kaplan, 1978). The magnitude of the effect of community type ranged from half to a whole standard deviation unit on each of 11 scales as well as the total score of a self-image measure. Similar results were obtained with the same instrument in a second rural community. Hence, we concluded that these rural youth feel worse about themselves than youth growing up in more urban environments. Only one of six previous studies of urbanicity and self-image have obtained similar results. Assuming that our results are real and replicated, we attributed them to the generally more limited occupational opportunities available to rural youth these days. The present report attempts to explore some reasons for this lower self- image.

Methods

The Sample

The primary subjects for this study were 127 randomly selected students from a rural community high school. The community is predominantly white and middle-class. The high school (grades 9-12) enrolled 1550 students in 1977-78, about two-thirds of whom lived outside the town of less than 8,000 people. The second rural sample is from another midwestern state. These 42 students were selected from three tiny country schools.

The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire

The Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) was developed in the early 1960's as a self-descriptive personality test of adjustment (Offer & Howard, 1972). It measures adjustment in eleven areas which represent important aspects of the psychological world of the teenager. The eleven scales include Impulse Control, Emotional Tone, Body- and Self-Image, Social Relations, Morals, Sex Attitudes, Family Relations, External Mastery, Vocational and Educational Goals, Psychopathology, and Superior Adjustment. In addition, a total score is calculated. Each of the 130 items consists of a statement with 6-option Likert-type response scale.

The OSIQ has been used in numerous studies with thousands of teenagers both in the United States and in several foreign countries (Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1977). Data have now been obtained on a cross-section of socio-economic levels.

Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations obtained for each scale for younger and older rural boys and girls. These are data from Community A. Note that the standard deviations are fairly stable and that the average responses are usually more positive than negative. (A higher score indicates a poorer self-image).

Table 2 shows the results of a multivariate analysis of variance

comparing the two rural communities. The multivariate effect of community is significant though univariate differences are obtained with only four of the eleven scales, as well as the total score. The scales showing differences are Body- and Self-Image, Family Relations, External Mastery, and Psychopathology. The magnitude of the significant differences ranges from about .4 to .7 of a standard deviation unit. With all scales, however, community A youth show lower self images than those in community B. A major difference in these two samples is school size. Community A youth attend a large consolidated high school while community B youth attend very small country schools.

Next we consider personal factors possibly related to self-image, shown on Table 3. Sex, but not age, is a highly significant multivariate factor. In other studies, younger youth frequently show lower self-image on several scales of the OSIQ. This was indeed the case with three scales (Body- and Self-Image, Vocational and Educational Goals, and Sex Attitudes) and the total score but there was no overall multivariate age effect.

Sex also is generally an important factor in other studies. In this study, girls feel better about themselves than do boys on the items measuring Morals while the reverse sex effect holds for Emotional Tone, Body- and Self-Image, and Psychopathology. The size of these effects ranges from about one-third to two-thirds of a standard deviation unit. These results are quite similar to those obtained with other samples though, in addition, boys are generally lower in self-image on more scales.

Table 4 summarizes the relationships between several background questions and the self-image scores. For both boys and girls, future educational and career plans are frequently and strongly related to self-image. Parental education as well as father's employment status is related to self-image for girls. For boys, the important parental variable is mother's employment status, with full-time employment of the mother related to higher self-image in her son. Younger siblings seem to have a negative influence on self-image with boys. For girls, older brothers are negatively related, while younger brothers are positively related to higher self-image. More frequent church attendance is related to better self-image for girls.

We measured attitudes toward women with a scale adapted from that developed by Spence and colleagues (Spence & Helmreich, 1972). As Table 5 shows, boys and girls differ significantly on most of these items; girls have more egalitarian attitudes than boys (except when it comes to asking boys out on dates). Attitudes toward women also relate differently to self-image for boys and girls. For boys, traditional and egalitarian attitudes toward women were about equally likely to be related to positive self-image. For girls, only with two items were traditional views related to positive self-image. There were 40 significant correlations between egalitarian views toward women and a positive self-image (compared to 3.6 expected by chance!) Hence, these data suggest that girls with more positive, egalitarian views of women have better self-image.

Discussion

The rural youth studied here reported less positive feelings about themselves than did their more urban counterparts. Some, though not all of this effect may be modified with smaller size.

In addition, we have presented evidence that, as with urban youth, age and especially sex are important factors influencing self-image among rural youth. Higher educational and career aspirations are very important for both boys and girls. In addition, parental educational and occupational status; the number, age and sex of siblings; and religiousity are of some importance. A critical factor for girls, perhaps determining the sex difference in self image, are their attitudes toward women. More positive, egalitarian views are related to better self-image for these rural girls.

We are currently collecting comparative data in a suburban sample to see if these same factors, particularly sex and attitudes toward women, are important for these youth as well. If these results hold up, we shall have strong evidence for the importance of the concordance between valued and attainable roles. When valued roles are unattainable by a particular group, we hypothesize that self-esteem is diminished for group members. Such a hypothesis would fit both the community and sex differences observed.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations

on OSTO Scales

for Rural Boys and Girls

	Boys		Girls	
Scale	Ages 13-15	Ages 16-18	Ages 13-15	Ages 16-18
Impulse Control	2.74 (.68)	2.72 (.71)	2.95 (.62)	2.86 (.77)
Emotional Tone	2.58 (.59)	2.41 (.65)	2.83 (.65)	2.69 (.56)
Body/Self-Image	2.90 (.58)	2.55 (.53)	3.20 (.64)	2.92 (.61)
Social Relations	2.58 (.49)	2.54 (.70)	2.69 (.61)	2.46 (.53)
Morals	2.95 (.52)	2.89 (.56)	2.66 (.51)	2.48 (.53)
Sexual Attitudes	2.86 (.68)	2.71 (.64)	3.13 (.63)	2.82 (.58)
Family Relations	2.52 (.65)	2.48 (.67)	2.55 (.74)	2.42 (.70)
External Mastery	2.72 (.54)	2.54 (.66)	2.74 (.45)	2.59 (.56)
Vocat/Educ Goals	2.38 (.70)	2.10 (.69)	2.32 (.55)	1.95 (.59)
Psychopathology	2.83 (.63)	2.65 (.54)	3.02 (.47)	2.88 (.59)
Superior Adjustment	2.83 (.50)	2.85 (.63)	2.98 (.46)	2.69 (.54)
Total Score	2.70 (.42)	2.57 (.49)	2.79 (.41)	2.59 (.39)
	n= 33	n= 27	n= 27	n= 38

Table 2

Sex and Age Differences Among
Rural Youth

Multivariate Effects[1]

Source	df	F
Sex	10,112	4.54****[3]
Age[2]	10,112	1.36
Sex X Age	10,112	.45

Univariate Results for Sex Effect

Scale	Means Boys (n=60)	Girls (n=65)	F[3]	Estimated effect
Impulse Control	2.73	2.90	1.93	-.25
Emotional Tone	2.50	2.75	5.80*	-.43
Body/Self Image	2.74	3.04	9.60**	-.56
Social Relations	2.57	2.55	.00	-.02
Morals	2.92	2.55	13.62***	.66
Sex Attitudes	2.79	2.95	2.55	-.29
Family Relations	2.50	2.47	.02	.02
External Mastery	2.64	2.65	.09	-.05
Voc/Educ Goals	2.25	2.11	.83	.16
Psychopathology	2.75	2.94	4.26*	-.37
Superior Adjustment	2.84	2.79	.12	.05
Total Score	2.64	2.67	.45	-.12

[1]Total score and Sex Attitudes are not included here.

[2]Though all ten scales taken together did not differentiate younger from older youth, three scales showed univariate significant differences. Younger youth had poorer Body - and Self-Image, Vocational/Educational Goals, and Sex Attitudes. Total Score showed similar significant age effects.

[3]**** $p < .0001$, *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

[4]This is the magnitude of the estimated effect of sex on the self-image scores in terms of standard deviation units. Roughly, this statistic tells how many standard deviations separate the means. A negative sign indicates poorer self-image for girls.

Table 3

Self-Image Among Older Adolescents in Two Rural Communities[1]

Multivariate Effects[2]

Effect	df	F
Sex	10,96	3.00**
Community	10,96	2.10*
Sex X Comm	10,96	0.30

Univariate Results for Community Effect

	Means			
Scale	Comm A	Comm B	p[3]	Estimated Effect Size[4]
Impulse Control	2.80	2.75	0.09	0.07
Emotional Tone	2.58	2.57	0.00	0.01
Body/Self-Image	2.77	2.49	5.88*	0.47
Social Relations	2.49	2.32	2.12	0.29
Morals	2.65	2.45	3.37	0.39
Sexual Attitudes[2]	2.77	2.56	2.69	0.35
Family Relations	2.44	1.97	12.80***	0.70
External Mastery	2.57	2.27	6.87**	0.49
Voc/Ed Goals	2.02	1.83	2.99	0.33
Psychopathology	2.78	2.56	3.97*	0.38
Superior Adjustment	2.76	2.56	3.38	0.37
Total Score[2]	2.58	2.38	7.14**	0.52
	n=65	n=44		

[1]Ages 16 to 18 years

[2]On 10 scales excluding Sex Attitudes and Total Score which were done in separate univariate analyses (see Univariate Results)

[3]*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

[4]Estimated effect size in standard deviation units. Since all signs are positive, B adolescents have better self-image than those in community A.

Table 4

Relationships Between Background Information and Self-Image for Rural Boys and Girls

	# sig r's with OSIQ scales[1]		OSIQ scales with r .30	
Question	M	F	M	F
grade	4	6	Body/Self Image	Voc/Ed Goals
age	3	2	Body/Self Image	Voc/Ed Goals
educ plans[2]	10	10	All ex Impl Contr; Soc Reln	Fam Reln; Voc/Ed Goals, Total
father educ		2		
mother educ		1		Mastery
father empl		4		Fam Reln
mother empl	3		Mastery	
# older brothers		3(-)		
# younger brothers	2(-)			
# older sisters				
# younger sisters	2(-)			
religiousity		2		Morals
career plans	10	8	Sex Att; Fam Reln; Mast; Psychopath, Total	Body/Sex Image; Morals Fam Reln; Voc/Ed Goals Sup Adj; Total

[1]Sign in parentheses after number means that more of the background item was related to lower self-image. No number means that there was 1 or 0 significant ($p < .05$) correlations with self-image.

[2]This was the only background item showing sex differences. Girls had higher aspirations than boys.

Table 5

Attitudes Toward Women and Self-Image
Among Rural Boys and Girls

		% Agree[1]		# sig r's with OSIQ scales[2]	
	Item	M	F	M	F
1.	worse for girls to swear	75.8	72.3	1	5(-)
2.	boys pay for date	82.8	66.2	1(-)	1
3.	special attention to women old-fashioned	32.8	35.4	4(-)	1(-)
4.	sons to college	33.4	17.0**	4	7
5.	OK girls play rough sports	58.6	90.7***	0	2
6.	father greater authority in family	56.9	35.4*	2(-)	5
7.	OK girls ask boys for date	66.7	49.3	2(-)	5
8.	boys do well in school	31.0	9.2	0	6
9.	husband share housework	65.5	87.7***	2(1+,1-)	1
10.	boys better leaders	58.6	18.5****	3(-)	4
11.	girls more domestic than professional	50.0	18.5****	4(3+,1-)	6
12.	girls same freedoms	65.5	96.9****	3	3

[1] strongly or mildly; significance of sex difference noted by *; * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$, **** $p<.0001$.

[2] Minus sign in parentheses indicates that a more traditional view of women was related to higher self-image.